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## **Fields and Individuals: From Bourdieu to Lahire and Back Again**

### **Abstract**

Bernard Lahire's critique of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology aims to establish a 'dispositionalist-contextualist' vision of human agency capable of fully sociologising biography and individuality. While accepting the utility of the notion of field, Lahire emphasises the plurality of non-field entities – including games, worlds and figurations – shaping people's dispositions and the contexts in which they come to act, leading him to downgrade the notion of habitus and cast fields as only a small part of the picture. While appreciating the motivation underpinning Lahire's project and the usefulness of some of his research-led insights, this paper argues that his skewed and partial reading of Bourdieu blinds him to the fact that solutions to some of the problems he identifies are already there in Bourdieu's framework and, indeed, that these are more coherent and comprehensive than some of the conceptual suggestions Lahire offers.

Keywords: Bourdieu, Lahire, Habitus, Field, Sociological biography

Pierre Bourdieu spent his career attempting to overcome a multitude of conceptual oppositions which, in his mind, pervaded social theory and hindered sociological inquiry. Prime among these was the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism, that is, between those perspectives emphasising lived experience and the role of meaning in driving social activity and those foregrounding the force of external social structures. Allied to this was the opposition between agency and structure, or freedom and determinism, counterposing those approaches to social life stressing voluntary and creative action and those assuming behaviour to be a mechanical output of structural dynamics. The micro-macro divide, opposing those traditions interested in everyday interaction and those advocating study of large-scale processed and long-term trends, was sometimes claimed to have been surmounted by association. In all cases

the solution to these problematic dualisms – pitting phenomenology against structuralism, interactionism versus functionalism, and so on – was held to be a discrete set of conceptual tools oriented around the core trio of habitus, capital and field.

There is, however, another basic opposition within sociology, and also between disciplines within the social sciences, that runs along similar but not identical tracks to the others mentioned. This is the opposition between *individual* and *society*, or, to layer in the temporal dimension famously highlighted by C. Wright Mills (1959), *biography* and *history*, that is to say, perspectives which take the complexities and idiosyncrasies of individual biographies and dispositions as their starting point and those that tend instead to depict people as simply exemplifications of particular roles, types, positions, trends or forces. Although Bourdieu only addressed it briefly compared to the subjectivism/objectivism and structure/agency schisms, he naturally believed that he had overcome this binary too insofar as individual idiosyncrasy derives from occupation of a specific position within a structural context (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1999, 2000).

Over the last few decades there has been one critic persistently claiming that Bourdieu's vision of the social world is more attuned to the 'society' side of the dualism – a problem which is no mere theoretical untidiness but a potential obscurer of specific springs of social practice. This critic is Bernard Lahire, who has sought to develop an alternative 'dispositionalist-contextualist' vision of human action indebted to Bourdieu but, by dropping some concepts and adding in new ones, capable of going beyond Bourdieu to establish not only a rigorous approach to sociological biography but nothing less than a full-scale research programme for a 'sociology at the level of the individual'. Exceptionally prolific and already well-known in France, Lahire has increasingly begun to publish in English and, as a result, capture interest in Anglophone sociology – both at the purely theoretical level, in major journals or set-piece texts

(see e.g. Frere, 2004, 2011; Baert and da Silva, 2010: 41-2), and in focussed research studies (e.g. Bennett et al, 2008; Ingram and Abrahams, 2016).

The contention of this paper is that whilst Lahire may certainly have a point, and whilst some of his suggestions may be fruitful, his skewed and partial reading of Bourdieu, and of the latter's phenomenological heritage, prevents him from seeing the solutions to many of the problems he flags are *already there in Bourdieu's writings*. He is right that Bourdieu paid little attention to specific themes and possibilities flowing from a focus on individuals, but that does not mean that Bourdieu's framework and its component concepts *cannot* make sense of those themes and possibilities. Certain synergies have to be emphasised and briefly-raised concepts foregrounded, for sure, but a careful handling of Bourdieu's work reveals some of Lahire's dismissals to be unfounded and some of his additions to be less useful than they first appear. Overall, while it could be said that Lahire has swung a little too far toward the 'individual' side of the polarity, the Bourdieusian framework, once elaborated, is capable of moving more seamlessly between individual and society, or biography and history.

### **Bourdieu on Individuals and Biography**

At the root of the matter is Bourdieu's contention that the fundamental object of social science is the *field* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 107). A field is a system of relations between positions defined by possession of specific types and combinations of *capitals*, these being the properties securing *misrecognition* – perception as an authority, a worthy contender, and so on – in relation to some specific domain of activity. Contemporary capitalist social orders are defined by a multitude of relatively autonomous fields – fields of politics, of cultural production (art, literature, fashion, etc.), of religion, of business and so on, as well as the field of classes more generally (or the 'social space'). In each case there is a specific form of capital at stake –

particular properties making someone a prominent and powerful politician, artist, religious leader, business leader and such like – and the more one has of it, the more prominent, or dominant, one is within the field. In many fields within capitalist social orders, however, these specific properties often compete with the logic of money – economic capital – as a definer of success.

Possession of certain amounts and types of capital structure the space of possible and conceivable ‘moves’ within a field: what appears doable for each individual in the quest for capital. Far from being a mechanical structural impulsion, however, the agent’s practice in relation to the field – the stances they take, the goods they produce, the strategies they pursue – are mediated by their *habitus*. The *habitus* is the individual’s sense of what is possible, their intuition of the game, built up through past experience in the field and adjusted to ongoing experience within the field. This sense is more or less fuzzy and hard to articulate – it is, above all, a *practical* sense – but it is what guides specific strategies, whether they be conservative (efforts to uphold one’s position or the state of the field in general) or subversive (efforts to overturn the structure of domination by undermining the principles on which it is built). Bourdieu also stresses that people are bound together into fields by a specific *doxa* – a taken-for-granted sense of what is done within the field underpinning conservative or subversive strategies – and *illusio* – a commitment to the game with the belief that it is worth the struggle.

This general conceptualisation of the social world was applied in analyses of the academic field (Bourdieu, 1988), the economic field (Bourdieu, 1996a, 2005) and the literary field (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996b), and commentators have since drawn on Bourdieu’s remarks to delineate what they take to be the appropriate steps of any rigorous Bourdieusian research: map out the structure of the field one is interested in, document its relation to other fields and reconstruct the different *habitus* producing divergent strategies and momentous events, including field-specific revolutions or ‘changings of the guard’ (e.g. Grenfell, 2010). When it comes to

individuals within the field, Bourdieu (1988) is fairly clear: they are only interesting insofar as they exert specific effects in the field, especially revolutionary effects. Proper sociological inquiry begins by stripping back our image of the person to only their pertinent properties – their capital, habitus and trajectory – within the field. This is the ‘epistemic individual’ – the analytical model of the individual – as opposed to the ‘empirical individual’ – the individual as we experience them in everyday life as a complex and idiosyncratic being. Whether it be Manet in relation to the artistic field, Heidegger in the philosophical field, Flaubert in the literary field or himself in the intellectual field, Bourdieu thus proceeded by isolating only the relevant capitals and dispositions possessed by each, often the product of a translation of their capital and trajectory in the social space pre-entry to the field into resources and orientations in the space of struggle in question (Bourdieu, 1990b, 1996b, 2004a, 2008, 2017). Manet was a revolutionary because of his mix of economic, cultural and social capital, therefore; Heidegger was a philosophical revolutionary because of his declining trajectory and lack of inherited cultural capital; Bourdieu’s intellectual sympathies and chosen topics were a product of his provincial origins and pathway through the education system – these are simplifications, but they convey the main thrust of Bourdieu’s arguments.

At one point Bourdieu (2000a) reflected specifically on the notion of biography (see also Gingras, 2000). Once again he seemed to be trying to weave between two poles, in this case the Sartrean progressive-regressive method, which starts out from a specific juncture in an individual’s life and traces backwards and forwards to see how it came to be, and Althusserian structuralism, which reduces the individual’s life course to their successive interpellations by the capitalist system. He warned explicitly against the ‘biographical illusion’ of reading the present into the past – the tendency, that is, to see the individual as they are now as having always been present in the past, as a telos that was always in-the-making – and emphasised the need to situate the individual in the space of possibilities open to them at the time, i.e. the

context provided by their location within a field or social space. Elsewhere he made clear that someone's location and trajectory in a field may be unique, giving specificity to an individual's existence, but railed against the 'naïve personalism' that celebrated or started from a person's idiosyncrasy (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1999).

### **From Field and Habitus to Contexts and Dispositions**

Unlike many critics of Bourdieu's framework, from Alexander (1994) to Rancière (2004), Lahire never rejected the utility of some of its concepts and themes. From his earliest research on schooling and quotidian language use (Lahire, 1993a, 1993b, 1995) through to his later studies of lifestyles and literature (Lahire, 2004, 2006), Lahire has sought instead to *extend* and *correct* Bourdieu's model of the social world, in dialogue with a range of alternative traditions – from psychoanalysis and interactionism to figurational sociology – so as to make better sense of what he finds.<sup>1</sup> He thus happily recognises that the concept of field is a fruitful one – people do indeed occupy positions in struggles over various forms of capital. The trouble is, says Lahire, Bourdieu's preoccupation with fields needlessly limited him to a narrow model of the object and purpose of sociological inquiry and blinded him from seeing that there is more to the social world. Sociologists can and should map out the structure and transformations of specific fields, but they can also switch perspective to look at specific individuals, and *not just as they relate to one field but in their totality*. We need, in other words, to make so-called empirical individuals the object of sociological inquiry. The fact is, argues Lahire, if we are serious about unravelling the dispositions at work in Heidegger's practice, or Manet's, or anyone else's for that matter, we have to look at the *multiple non-field contexts of socialisation* they are and have been situated in: their family, their school, their employer and so on. Bourdieu's problem is thus that he only ever saw people as 'beings-in-a-field' (Lahire, 2015:

*passim*), when in fact they are much more than that, and we need to bear that in mind when trying to make sense of a specific individual's heritage of dispositions and their practice.

Several consequences follow from this shift of regard. First, concludes Lahire, it problematises the very notion of habitus, and its phenomenological baseline provided by Edmund Husserl, since in Lahire's mind the multiplicity of people's dispositions across socialisation contexts, some of which may be in direct conflict, defies the unity and coherence that concept presupposes (Lahire, 2011: 13). We are 'plural actors', with dispositions formed in and attuned to different sets of relations – dispositions are not, as Bourdieu presupposed, ever-present or transposable across all situations. Second, it allows for a more encompassing model of the social world. The myriad fields posited and studied by Bourdieu, after all, relate to fairly elite professions and thus yield an especially impoverished view – essentially a class reductionist one – of how people outside the top slice of society have come to be as they are (Lahire, 2015: 74). Third, we can now clear up the crucial question – apparently ignored by Bourdieu (Lahire, 2017) – of how people came to enter a field in the first place; how, that is, their *illusio* for the field and their decision to do what it takes to enter it were generated.

Fundamental to this last point is the role of the family. Drawing on the insights of psychoanalysis, suitably sociologised via Norbert Elias, Lahire is keen to stress that it is in the family milieu – the loving and conflictual relations with and between parents and other kin, sometimes in competition with child-carers and school staff – that fundamental dispositions and desires are first formed. This is no seamless transmission of resources or passive absorption of tastes but a question of struggles, identifications and rejections. Yet the family is evidently not a field, stresses Lahire (2015: 77-8), for three reasons: (i) it does not perform a specific function in the differentiated division of labour of contemporary societies, like other fields; (ii) there is no relatively autonomous 'familial capital' defining its existence; and (iii) family relations are as much about solidarity and mutual help as struggle and are composed of specific



and unequal roles and commitments (parent/child, husband/wife) unlike any other field.<sup>2</sup> For these reasons Lahire describes the family as a figuration, or system of interdependences, instead – a move that identifies a gaping hole in Bourdieu's framework at the same time as it endeavours to plug it.

Defining the family as a figuration opens the door for a fourth consequence. Not all contexts of socialisation are related to fields, but that does not mean they are not socially structured. The fact is, argues Lahire, fields are just one kind of social structure – one form a set of relations between people can take – among many. As well as figurations there are also 'worlds', like those studied by interactionists: systems of exchange and cooperation between different kinds of people engaged in activity related to a specific domain or endeavour. Artists, paint and canvas manufacturers, curators and critics are all enmeshed in specific relations of interdependence relating to the production and mediation of artworks, for example, but they do not all exist within one field. And then there are 'games', a notion which Lahire uses to describe amateur or part-time production of works or practices related to a specific field assuming some kind of attunement to it (its structure, its struggles) but not necessarily consistent participation or recognition within it.

The concept of game suggested itself to Lahire (2006) in his research on writers. Very few people who would be described as writers, after all, actually partake fully in what Bourdieu (1996b) identified as the literary field. Unlike players in the scientific or academic fields who can commit more completely to their struggles because they have secure, paid positions enabling it, most writers have other jobs to pay the bills – they are teachers, translators, publishers and such like – and are often kept from creative work by family obligations and dramas. Only a minority, freed from pressure for other work and neglecting family life, dedicate themselves entirely to writing and its prizes, so only a few actually qualify as full-time 'agents' of the kind studied by Bourdieu (Lahire, 2015: 78ff). The rest are players, coming

on and off the pitch as time and money allow and attracting only sporadic and localised recognition. The result is something of a ‘double life’ for most writers: a sense of being torn between different universes, with different demands and obligations, different associated dispositions or mindsets and different satisfactions. Emblematic of this kind of existence is Franz Kafka, whose writings were produced while he worked in law and business and were mostly unpublished in his lifetime. Lahire’s (2010) detailed analysis of Kafka’s life, however, also unearthed something else. In tracing out the writer’s family figuration – the father-son relationship especially – as well as sexual relations, employment pressures and the state of Czech literature at the time, Lahire postulated the existence of a core ‘existential issue’ underpinning the form and content of Kafka’s works. This is the set of concerns and problems facing an individual, manifest in their major anxieties and fears, that have developed over their life course and relate to the relations and tensions not just *within* specific contexts (including fields) but *between* them too – between family life and literary production, for example. In Kafka’s case, literature, and the image of absurd oppression he repeatedly created, allowed him to work out on paper his relations to his father, his Jewishness and his tear between paid employment and creative endeavour.

### **From Contexts and Dispositions to Lifeworlds and Social Surfaces**

Lahire has a point. There is surely more going on in the production of a specific artwork, for example, at a certain time and place than just attunement to the artistic field; more to the social conditions of possibility of an activity or position-taking than position within a field alone; factors facilitating, slowing or halting trajectories other than the possibilities opened up purely by the state of the field. The possibles opened up by the evolving distribution of capital may form the *bulk* of the explanation in a large number of cases, necessitating the documentation

of the structure and struggles there, but there is a significant residue weighing on practices that may sometimes be crucial for explaining specific position-takings and trajectories of greater or lesser consequence for the field. What goes on in the family, moreover, must surely rank highly among these additional factors – doing or not doing something because of familial obligations or expectations – as might the culture and demands of specific employers or the split between paid employment and creative work. Shifting from analysis of a specific field to analysis of specific beings for whom participation in that field is only a portion of their lives does, indeed, reveal new phenomena in need of explanation and new conceptual needs. But are Lahire's other critiques and conceptual offerings fruitful? Do we need to jettison habitus and add other kinds of social structures to the picture? Here I am more sceptical, largely because Lahire assumes a very peculiar and narrow understanding of fields.

### *Worlds, Figurations and Games*

Accepting the existence of fields, and of struggles for capital, has corollaries for the specific understanding of human beings and their activity in play. It presupposes that the fundamental driver of human activity is the quest for worth and recognition in the eyes of others and that capitals represent the arbitrary properties that have, through specific historical struggles, become *misrecognised* as inherent sources of worth and legitimacy in the eyes of specific others, placing people in structural relation to one another, worth striving for (Bourdieu, 1990c, 2000b). A field is not simply a distribution of resources or powers that people struggle for in utilitarian or Nietzschean style, but a provider of purpose and passion as well as devaluation and depression. If Lahire is indeed, as he indicates, operating with the specifically Bourdieusian rendering of fields – rather than, say, the alternative rendering of Fligstein and McAdams (2011) – then this is the starting point.

There are consequences of this foundation for the notion of ‘world’. This may be a useful addition to the toolbox – artists, suppliers manufacturers and critics, for instance, are indeed enmeshed in identifiable networks of exchange, interaction and interdependence that facilitate or constrain certain strategies and tactics. However, while they may not exist within a *single* field, they certainly exist within their *own* fields – the field of art, the field of critics and, in the case of manufacturers, the economic field – and it is their orientation to the stakes of those fields, and the recognition they promise, that underpin their propensities to exchange and interact with, or supply for, specific others in different fields and which translate the possibilities and constraints they present into the logic and potentialities of the field. Bourdieu often indicated as much, of course (on manufacturing innovations and the artist field, for example, see Bourdieu, 2017: 246). He was probably too absolutist in his rejection of the notion of worlds: there are explanatory payoffs in recognising and properly mapping the interdependencies between fields and specific agents, and if he had followed through the logic of his comments rather than seek to emphasise difference he might have been more accommodating. However, if there is a kind of dialectical interplay between fields and world relations, with the latter impacting upon objective and subjective possibilities within the former, the interchange is nonetheless unequal: fields, and the human strivings they structure, are the prime mover.

If the notion of worlds may be fruitful, once properly situated, this is less the case for the argument that families are figurations rather than – as Bourdieu (1998, 2000b) suggested – fields. Lahire’s three points against the notion of the family as a field are all misplaced. First, the requirement that a field be related to a specific function in the division of labour imposes a Durkheimian – and thoroughly substantialist – definition on the notion of field that was never there in Bourdieu’s work. True enough, Bourdieu sometimes talked about the division of labour of domination, but only as a means to articulate the opposition between spiritual and temporal

powers that seems to reappear across social orders under different guises as a consequence of basic features of *Homo Sapiens* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1993). The differentiation of fields at the top of society in the modern period is the historical by-product of concrete struggles to consolidate or break from state power and is linked to the existence or appearance of relatively autonomous (sub)species of capital, i.e. principles of misrecognition irreducible to others, not the differentiation of functions (Bourdieu, 2004b, 2014, 2017). There is no *a priori* reason why a relatively autonomous form of capital cannot also exist or emerge outside the field of power to generate localised (mis)recognition struggles between specific sets of agents. It is worth remembering, moreover, that the original form of the state in the early medieval period – the dynastic state or ‘king’s house’ – was itself a field based on unequal favour across extended kin relations.

This brings us to the second point: is there a distinctly familial form of capital? While symbolic power within a family – the capacity of specific individuals to impose and challenge definitions of the done thing and right thing among constituent players – may be based on heteronomous sources of power like money or the physical capital of force, is there a capital specific to family relations that would qualify them as a field? Bourdieu was not explicit on this, but my contention, extending on the logic of his (2000b: 164ff) comments, is that there is: the capital of *love*. There is not the space to make the case at length for that idea here – that has been done elsewhere (Author) – but suffice it to say that filial or romantic affection and care, as forms of recognition, can operate as modalities of *misrecognition* insofar as they grant symbolic power, become unequally distributed and are subjects of struggle and striving.<sup>3</sup> Ironically enough, it is psychoanalysis (which Lahire draws from), as well as the sociology of the family (which Lahire pays less attention to), that have demonstrated this so vividly. Evidently the familial field is not exactly the same as the scientific field or bureaucratic field: capital is sustained or augmented largely through constant interpersonal exchanges and acts of (mis)recognition (gifts, care,

attention, etc.) rather than impersonal institutional mechanisms. Yet that does not render the family something other than a field – fields and capitals can be maintained and reproduced in different ways, as Bourdieu (1990a) suggested and others have elaborated (e.g. Krause, 2017). To limit the existence of fields to professions or distinct occupational clusters is to foist an arbitrary limit on the concept that Bourdieu himself never stipulated.

The argument that families cannot be fields because they entail solidarity and obligation as well as specific interdependent roles is also problematic. None of those factors is necessarily absent from other fields, first of all – think of all the explicit and implicit roles, obligations, dependencies and solidarities within the Church (the religious field) or the civil service (the bureaucratic field), for example – but the main point is that *they all depend on and maintain a system of mutual misrecognition*. They are part and parcel of field struggles, in other words: phenomena implicated, mobilised or at stake in struggles over capital. Assignment of tasks, a sense of obligation and reciprocal dependence do not spring from nowhere – they operate via assumptions, negotiations and exchanges premised on (mis)recognition of the others involved and the imbalances inhering therein. Nor do solidarity and collective sentiment – the crucial questions being how they are established, who maintains them and how and whether there are still efforts at subversion, however minor.<sup>4</sup>

What stands for families stands, *mutatis mutandis*, for another alleged non-field context flagged by Lahire: workplace relations. Here Bourdieu (2005) was even more explicit that firms (and by extension any large organisation) can operate as fields, with their own stakes, intra-firm masteries and titles operating as forms of capital and strategies with consequences for workers' experiences. Far from being confined to the elite, therefore, we now see that participation in fields beyond the social space is much more common than Lahire supposes.

Finally, there is Lahire's notion of games. Is this really a necessary conceptual addition? First of all, there are those who, for example, write in their spare time because they enjoy it and have a degree of mastery of the positions and dynamics of the literary field but who either do not publish or publish in outlets with little or no recognition. In this case they are the 'non-professional cultural producers' alluded to by Bourdieu (1996b: 124) whose tastes and practice are defined largely by their class position and capitals (Bourdieu, 1984; see also Author).<sup>5</sup> There seems to be little analytical payoff in adding anything more to it than that. As soon as any of those individuals become recognised in some way, however – as soon as they exert *field effects* by becoming a reference point (specific or vague, precisely named or seen as symptomatic of a 'movement') for others' public literary activity – they become effective agents within the field (Bourdieu, 1996b: 225-6). Perhaps they are a dominated agent, and exert only a weak and localised 'pull' on other agents, and perhaps they phase in and out of the field over time – but does that make the structure of relations involved any less a field? Only if one operates with the strange and narrow understanding of a field that Lahire does: one in which players seem to have to dedicate their whole lives to it, with no time in everyday life for other pursuits or relations. If that were the dividing line then surely *no* field would really count as a field, or each 'field' would only ever be populated by a tiny number of unusual individuals – most scientists, artists, politicians and so on, even highly successful and famous ones, dedicate a good portion of their time and mental energy toward their families or institutional concerns, after all, even if they are not always successful in them. If, on the other hand, the criterion for field membership is occupation of a specific paid position (recalling that Durkheimian reading of fields), then this is not only just one form a field boundary can take but one that is subject to greater or lesser struggle over history and only ever empirically verifiable rather than conceptual *a priori* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 100). If officially nominated 'scientists' begin to orient themselves toward and respond to the work of those not so nominated, but

oriented to them in return and seemingly competing for the same stakes, then the non-nominated are exerting field effects and become agents in the field (in which case the nominal status can function as a form of capital). Some officially designated ‘scientists’, on the other hand, may be so inactive and unknown that they can be said to exercise no agency in the scientific field.

### *Habitus and Social Surface*

So far then, we have substituted Lahire’s vision of individual biographies and contexts being shaped by multiple types of social structure – fields, figurations and games – for a vision of individual biographies and contexts simply being shaped by multiple fields, big and small, as well as the interrelations between fields in the form of worlds. He is still right, of course, that individuals are more than their participation and dispositions within one field, and that this can have consequences for understanding their practice relevant to that one field, but now we see it is typically a case of individuals participating in more than one field successively and/or concurrently – and since these fields include families and employing institutions, the logic applies not just to elites but to just about *everybody* (cf. Schmitz et al, 2017). Does this still mean that Lahire is right about the habitus, then? Does that notion, and its phenomenological heritage, presuppose unity and integration across fields and thus need to be abandoned? My contention is that it should be retained, but that some specification is needed.

There is a tension in Bourdieu’s use of the notion of habitus across his work. For the most part the assumption is that habitus exists in relation to a single field, whether the social space or a field of cultural or economic production (in which case the field-specific habitus is an inflection of the original class habitus). This assumption fits with its core definition as the schemes of perception and dispositions attuned to the state of the field, that is to say, the sense of the state



of play, one's place and the possibilities within a field. The utility of the notion in empirical research (as opposed to just talking about practical action) comes primarily through identifying *classes* or *species* of habitus within a field – the habitus of the new petite bourgeoisie, or the subversive artistic habitus, and so on – while recognising that individuals, with slightly different positions and trajectories, will have unique modulations of that class of habitus. Yet the habitus is also assumed to be exhaustive of the whole person, the sum of their dispositions and schemes of perception, which would thus seem to overlook 'extra-field' phenomena or reduce them down to the logic of the one field.

The tension is underscored in the rare instances where Bourdieu does acknowledge the possibility of individuals occupying positions in multiple fields: then the habitus is 'integrating necessities of different orders' and generating 'complex strategies' (1990c: 73), like the 'double plays' of the politician-judge (1996a: 271; see also Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 127). Possibly he is alluding to his general theme of 'transposability' – dispositions honed in one field are transposed to another where they work out differently in accord with the state of play there. Yet it does begin to slip away from, or implicate more than, the core function of the term as encapsulating adaptation to a specific state of a field given one's position and past within it and the practical use of the term for identifying classes or clusters within a field. This is accentuated when one factors family fields and employer fields into the picture – Bourdieu never traced out the full consequences of these late additions to his writings for practice – since they make multiplicity much more prominent and pervasive than Bourdieu seemed to assume.

In his remarks on biography, however, Bourdieu did provide a potential conceptual solution to the problem – he just never returned to it (see further, Author). Here he introduced the notion of 'social surface', defined as 'the collection of positions simultaneously occupied at a given moment of time by a biological individual' resting on 'a collection of attributes suitable for allowing [that individual] to intervene as an efficient agent in different fields' (Bourdieu,

2000a: 302, 303n8). Whatever Bourdieu's precise intention here, it can be profitably used to draw a new distinction. This is the distinction between *habitus*, as the schemes of perception related to a specific field, and – re-interpreting the term to cover dispositions rather than positions (which perhaps fits with Bourdieu's equation of it with 'personality') – the *social surface*, as the totality of and relations between dispositions and schemes of perception stemming from the specific fields (the social space, the family, their employer, etc.) the individual participates in. If the habitus is something assigned to the epistemic individual, then the social surface (as a kind of 'meta-habitus') is the equivalent term for rendering the empirical individual.

As for those 'attributes' allowing, or rather necessary for, intervention across fields, they can be interpreted as what knit together the different field-specific habitus into a unified social surface. Here we can extend on the phenomenological logic of the habitus. The foundation for the term, after all, is the notion of *horizon* – that which is co-given with any percept, without conscious positing, built up through experience (like the awareness of a table's unseen underside) – and its temporal correlate of *protention* – the sense of the forthcoming, the likely, the possible, etc. given by the present.<sup>6</sup> If the 'field horizon' generates the feel for the game, then now we add in, after Husserl, the 'world horizon' underpinning the feel for the *games* one is playing – the sense, that is, of how activity within one field (e.g. the family field) will impact upon position and possibilities in another field (e.g. the artistic field) and vice versa. This can be cast diachronically, or biographically, too. The individual starts with a ('primary') habitus forged within the familial field, which then, with progressive entry into the social space and other fields, is translated and transformed into field-specific ('secondary') habitus. Specifically familial habitus still persists and mutates over time, however, in line with the evolving state of play in the family, but now, as a component part of the social surface, it plays off the schemes of perception adapted to the new fields too.

Lahire may still complain that this reading presupposes integration and unity. Yet it depends what one means by those terms. The social surface does not assume the different habitus or schemes of perception across fields are *harmonious* or *the same*. It may well entail conflict and clash of contrasting dispositions – the ‘cleft habitus’ that Bourdieu sometimes talked about – in tune with contrasting positions and possibilities as well as imbalances in the strength of respective *illusio*. The point is, however, that the sense of harmony or tension is only possible *because of* phenomenological synthesis, i.e. because one senses that activity related to different fields work together in everyday life or compete with and impede one another. Even notions that one needs different ‘mind-states’ when attending to different fields, or feels like ‘different people’ in each, or describes oneself as ‘schizophrenic’, still logically rest on a basic integrative, unified sense of one’s whole self and situation. The interrelation of fields in lived experience need not be so compartmentalised or readily articulable, of course – it could be a case of experiences, pertinences and associations from one field bleeding into perception and practice in another, as with instances of ‘analogical transfer’ mentioned by both Bourdieu and Lahire.<sup>7</sup>

Lahire’s own notion of the ‘existential issue’, as a logic crossing contexts (or fields), might be said to presuppose precisely such a unity. In Kafka’s case, writing the literature he did was an expression of his sense of being dominated, unrecognised or otherwise miserable across multiple fields: in the family, where his father was dominant and his efforts to marry foundered; in the ethno-racial space, as a Jew in Prague;<sup>8</sup> vis-à-vis the literary field, which he was trying with little success (despite a strong *illusio*) to enter; and in his employing organisation, the stakes of which he had a weak *illusio* for despite traversing an ascendant trajectory. Domination in just one of those spaces (especially the family field) might have been enough to inspire the vision of authoritarianism haunting his manuscripts, but its manifestation as arbitrary and relentless legal-bureaucratic procedures and constraints was doubtless informed by his other

positions and struggles. He was able and inclined to express all this in fictionalised form, moreover, only because of his classed masteries and tastes: dispositions acquired in his early years and partly definitive of his position in the social space formed the horizon of possibilities for cathartic release. His writings, then, are a product of blending, fusion and analogization of experiences and capacities across fields only made possible by a subtending social surface.

More generally, many of Kafka's major decisions and frustrations in adulthood only really make sense once we consider his intuition of how fields interrelated in his life and how, specifically, participation in one field blocked or facilitated (potential) participation in another – once, in other words, we consider his world horizon. He was repeatedly irritated, for example, that he could not dedicate more time to writing, and break into the literary field, because of the time he was expected to work for his father (who he would not defy for expectation of the consequences) and with his brother-in-law in family businesses; he gave up his first job in an insurance company, exiting the field, because the long hours impeded his writing and thus desire to more forcefully participate in the literary field; he despised his next job, but continued with it, executed his duties efficiently and worked up the ranks because he could finish at 2pm and commit the rest of the day to writing; and so on. The conditions of possibility for the production of his works were not just his positions and probabilities in several fields, as important as they are to the story, but the articulation of the *competing* demands on his time, attention and energy provided by the *combination* of fields eliciting varying levels of commitment.<sup>9</sup>

Distinguishing between habitus and social surface, field horizon and world horizon, rather than simply working with a notion of a plurality of dispositions and contexts, affords greater possibilities for integrating levels of analysis and bridging the individual/society schism. One can map the general structure and interrelation of specific fields or social spaces as a means to disclose the fundamental principles of objective and subjective difference and drivers of broad

social changes, aware of yet ‘bracketing’, to use Giddens’ (1984) term, the complications of individual lifeworlds. Or one can reconstruct the plethora of forces structuring individual lifeworlds and social surfaces as a means to unpack the genesis of particularly consequential field manoeuvres or biographical transition points (e.g. the varied paths from school to employment), cognisant of the key oppositions or possibilities of implicated fields without necessarily mapping them fully. Or, of course, analysis of field structures and strategies – relating, for example, to feminisation of the workforce or discourses and policies relating to ‘work-life balance’ – may illuminate the origins and transformations of broad tendencies in the structuring of individual lifeworlds. The point is, whereas Lahire has expended all his energy making the case for the sociology at the level of the individual, and never engaged in serious field analysis, now we are able to move more seamlessly between the two.

## **Conclusion**

Bernard Lahire’s critique of Bourdieu’s sociological vision has opened up new possibilities. He has rightly questioned the assumption that Bourdieu-inspired sociology can or should proceed only by analysing a single field or social space and, in the process, made clear that people and their daily experiences are more than their participation in a single structural space. Mapping fields, habitus, strategies and transformations are still fundamental tasks of the sociologist – even though Lahire himself does not engage in them – but they can and must be complemented by focussed analyses of specific individuals or groups of individuals and the multiplicity of forces shaping their decisions, their practices and their outputs. Only then can we attain a comprehensive picture of the genesis of specific momentous strategies or a handle on the systematic interrelationships between fields, including the family field, for different sections of the population.

Lahire's effort to posit new concepts to facilitate this shift of perspective, however, has been less fruitful. The notion of world, once situated relative to fields, may well offer extra explanatory purchase, but the arguments that families are figurations and that some bundles of relations are games are less convincing. Family relations are field relations, and they are fundamental to reconstructing not just the genesis of dispositions and desires in the early years but the major ongoing tensions and conflicts in many people's lives. The notion of games, similarly, only seems credible and necessary if the concept of field is arbitrarily narrowed and skewed. As for the habitus, this concept is worth retaining, against Lahire's advice, so long as its place in the theoretical system is made clear, particularly its relation to the little-known idea of social surface as the totality of an individual's dispositions and schemes of perception across fields. One can study fields and constituent habitus, and one can study lifeworlds and social surfaces. The two endeavours are complementary possibilities enabled by the same theoretical system, and in conjunction they might just offer a better – if by no means definitive – lens on the interplay of individual biography and societal history than that offered by Lahire or, indeed, the common interpretation and use of Bourdieu's tools.

## Notes

1. The major conceptual interventions, as reflections on research, are contained in Lahire (1999, 2001, 2012), with key translations and summaries in English being Lahire (2003, 2011, 2015, 2017, 2020).
2. Lahire is not alone in the contention that family relations are not fields (see also Benson and Neveu, 2011; Wacquant, 2017), though he is the only one to offer a defined conceptual alternative.

3. Love can, under certain circumstances, become freed from imbalances and struggles over power, but this is a limit case (Bourdieu, 2001).
4. Relevant themes in this regard from Bourdieu's writings are the maintenance of doxa and orthodoxy by the dominant, 'group making' via delegation and the mystery of ministry and the potential ossification of field relations into apparatuses (see further, Author).
5. In his diagram of the literary field within the field of power and the social space, Bourdieu placed non-professional cultural producers to the right of the field of cultural production. This was doubtless to show they are 'outside' the field, but it is misleading (implying they are all richer in economic than cultural capital). It might be more accurate to think of them as being situated in the top left (high culture pole) of the social space but 'behind' the literary field.
6. That this is the case is established in Bourdieu's early work on Algeria (Bourdieu, 1964) and maintained consistently thereafter (e.g. Bourdieu, 1990c: 109; 2000b: 207ff; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 129).
7. This raises the question systematically tackled by Lahire of the *in situ* 'activation' of dispositions. Again, a relational rendering of phenomenology offers a fruitful solution here, specifically the structuring of what Schutz (1970) called 'relevance' by the spatiotemporal articulation of field effects in lifeworlds and streams of consciousness. For an empirical analysis of this in relation to class and family, see Author.
8. On the concept of ethno-racial space, which adds another layer of multiplicity to people's lives, see Emirbayer and Desmond (2015) and Author. Lahire also focuses on Kafka's specifically sexual desires, which might be rendered in terms of a suitably conceptualised 'sexual field' and the channelling and balance of libido/illusio (see, again, Author).
9. For Bourdieu's own take on Kafka's writings, which casts them as an expression of subjection to the operations of the field of power, see Bourdieu (2000b: 229ff).

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